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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 003714

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [EAID](#) [KDEM](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: NEW GOVERNANCE CZAR POPAL LAUNCHES AMBITIOUS
STRATEGY, INCLUDING SECURITY ROLE

REF: KABUL 3054

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) Jelani Popal's three-year strategic plan for his new Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) aims to strengthen sub-national governance by holding appointed representative District Councils accountable for local governance, development, poppy-eradication, and security. To reinforce the role of district officials in security functions, the plan includes a "Communities Self-Defense Program," which would vest in Popal's directorate responsibility for coordinating civil and military lines of operation at the local level. District officials would be authorized to up to 300 "community defense volunteers." Popal claims President Karzai's full support promised an elaboration of his strategy within three months. He has identified Wardak Province as the target for his first Self-Defense Force trials. CSTC-A is talking to Popal to identify areas of complementarity between the Focused District Development concept and IDLG's proposed Community Self-Defense Program (septel). Donors who focus on governance issues are wary of the security elements of Popal's plan, and some in the Afghan government are likely to see his initiative as an infringement on their turf. The Ambassador has assured Popal of U.S. support and encouraged him to prioritize his efforts in order to maximize results over the next 24 months. END SUMMARY.

POPAL LAUNCHES LOCAL GOVERNANCE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

12. (SBU) On October 4, Jelani Popal presented to senior Afghan officials and foreign diplomats a three-year strategic plan at the official launch of his new Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG). The IDLG's strategic framework aims to strengthen sub-national institutions, improve service delivery, eliminate discrimination against women, reduce corruption, and attack poppy production. The plan also features a "Communities Self-Defense Program," which would vest in Popal's directorate responsibility for coordinating civil and military lines of operation in each

province.

DISTRICT COUNCILS AND COMMUNITY SELF-DEFENSE VOLUNTEERS

¶3. (SBU) Popal's proposal calls for the civil authority in each district being embodied in appointed District Councils, comprised of up to 60 traditional maliks and other local leaders identified by the IDLG in consultation with local NGOs and the Tribal Liaison Office. These appointed District Councils will, in the short term, play the role of the elected District and Village Councils foreseen in the Constitution. Popal has set 2010 as a goal to have the legislation in place for District Council elections, but he has said that a decision as to when they will actually take place will depend on conditions on the ground.

¶4. (SBU) The District Councils would oversee the execution of local development projects and develop district poppy eradication plans. Each District Council member would also be responsible for recruiting five (for a total of up to 300 per district) "Community Defense Volunteers," local Afghans from the district "who would wear police uniforms and report to the district chief of police." The District Councils would each sign a memorandum of understanding with the IDLG describing their responsibility for the performance of the Community Defense Volunteers and implementation of an agreed poppy-eradication plan. In return for good performance, the Afghan government would make available modest salaries for the Community Defense Volunteers and alternative income and development packages for poppy-growing and insurgent-afflicted districts. The goal is to regenerate confidence in the local government by demonstrating that it

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is prepared to meet citizens' need for security and services.

¶5. (SBU) Popal also underlined the importance of better coordination between expanded civil governance activities and on-going military counter-insurgency operations. He proposed establishing a Task Force on Governance and a Task Force on Security in each province. The latter would be responsible for coordination between civil authorities, such as the governors and line ministry representatives, and security authorities, including the Afghan National Army, Afghan National Police, and the National Directorate for Security. Popal plans to focus the IDLG's initial efforts on "priority provinces" in the south and southeast, specifically Wardak, Ghazni, Uruzgan, Zabul, Kandahar, Helmand, Farah, and Logar. He told us on October 10 that he looked forward to coordinating his efforts with CSTC-A's Focused District Development (FDD) plan, which identifies vulnerable districts for special police train-and-equip and rule of law investments (septel).

KARZAI SUPPORT; DONOR QUESTIONS

¶6. (SBU) Popal told POLoff at the October 4 presentation that he had presented his plan earlier the same day to President Karzai, who gave his full support, including for the security component. Foreign diplomats pledged support for the plan at the IDLG inauguration and again at the October 11 Policy Action Group (PAG) meeting -- of which Popal is now a full participant. They nevertheless had concerns about the scope of the plan and expressed concern over the political and administrative difficulties Popal would face as he moved to implement the plan. Development/governance-focused donors were wary of Popal's security ambitions and flagged they might not be able to provide resources for the self-defense element of the plan. They described his plan's security facet as "food for thought." Popal promised a full elaboration of his strategy within three months.

AMBASSADOR EXPRESSES SUPPORT; URGES POPAL TO PRIORITIZE

¶17. (SBU) The Ambassador used his meeting with Popal on October 18 to underline U.S. support for the IDLG and Popal's efforts. The Ambassador welcomed the proposal as consistent with Karzai's vision of a partnership between state and local entities. He applauded the fact that the plan is to be anchored at the district level and will explicitly link security and development. This is fundamental both to giving people a stake in both and increasing the chances of success.

The key to drawing the communities into the process will be ensuring that the program reflects the local leadership as it really exists. Success will bring great payoffs, but the challenges are significant, and failure will just result in a new round of unmet expectations. The Ambassador underlined the need to prioritize, focus efforts and resources, and calibrate implementation to maximize success. The government must demonstrate over the next 24 months that it can deliver. Progress on the security front is essential.

¶18. (SBU) Popal said he agreed with the need to prioritize, not just programmatically, but also geographically. Highlighting that, in his view the problem was not so much a strong enemy as weak state institutions, he said he had already identified provinces and districts where there was both need and potential to succeed. He reported he already had assessment teams working in Wardak Province, adding he planned to set up the Security Task Force and the Governance Task Force shortly. The first targets would be districts where the community wanted to resist the Taliban but where the government presence, particularly in terms of security, does not currently constitute a critical mass. He reiterated that his 18-month goal is to have programs in place in six provinces. Popal told the Ambassador he recognized the challenge of creating local self-defense forces that avoid the trap of becoming local militia. The key, he said, will be strong links to and accountability through the District Chief of Police. Popal underlined that he is committed to

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coordinating his initiative with CSTC-A's Focused District Development plan. He will work closely with CSTC-A and is counting on Regional and Provincial Security Coordination Centers (RSCCs and PSCCs) playing an increasing role in integrating ANA, ANP and NDS operations, particularly in the South and East. This will provide a critical partner for Popal's efforts. The guiding principle is ensuring those responsible for local governance and security have the authority and resources to match their responsibilities.

IMPLEMENTATION WILL REQUIRE PLAYING POLITICS

¶19. (SBU) Moving the local government function from the Ministry of Interior to an Office in the Palace signaled the importance President Karzai places on the issue, and he personally chose Popal to lead the effort. Popal appreciates this does not guarantee success. He is keenly aware of the need not just for a plan and resources, but for political support within the government. Several senior Afghan government officials -- mostly Popal's personal friends and political allies -- were assembled when he rolled out his proposal. They included Finance Minister Ahady, who is Chair (Popal is Deputy Chair) of the Afghan Millat party. NDS Chief Saleh, whose father worked with Popal at a construction company 20 years ago, was also present. Others included MP Mir Wis Yasini, who is also linked to Afghan Millat, and representatives of the Ministry of Education, who are close to Popal's deputy in the Palace and were instrumental in shaping Popal's plans. Palace insider Farook Wardak was also present, but he was clearly uncomfortable throughout the presentation and awkwardly asked to leave early.

¶10. (C) Popal's deputy for policy, Barna Karimi, highlighted that Farook Wardak had hoped to have a more central role in shaping and staffing the IDLG. Karimi observed that, while Wardak has recently lost influence with Karzai (reportedly in

part due to having pressed for ForMin Spanta's dismissal), he retains more than enough influence to complicate-to-death initiatives he does not support. According to Karimi, Popal, who would some day like to lead Afghan Millat Party, also appreciates the need to maintain the goodwill of Finance Minister Ahady, who controls the resources Popal will need to succeed.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) Popal's appointment and the creation of the ILDG are the necessary second step, following transfers of responsibility for the governors from the Ministry of Interior to the Palace, in the Embassy's effort to get better local governance. Popal's ambitious agenda will undoubtedly be adjusted and reduced as he begins to run afoul of entrenched interests, both legitimate and corrupt. Our goal will be to support him and the core functions of his office, especially regarding the appointment of good governors and the replacement of bad ones.

WOOD